



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

21486

40.49.6

QUATTRO-
CENTESIMA



IN VICE
REVERENDI



HARVARD
COLLEGE
LIBRARY



QUATTRO-
CENTISTERIA



MAURICE
HEWLETT





QUATTROCENTISTERIA



21486.40.49.6

*Death, why hast thou made life so hard to bear,
Taking my lady hence? Hast thou no whit
Of shame? The youngest flower and the most fair
Thou hast plucked away, and the world wanteth it,
O leaden Death, hast thou no pitying?
Our warm love's very spring
Thou stopp'st, and endest what was holy and meet;
And of my gladdening
Mak'st a most woful thing,
And in my heart dost bid the bird not sing
That sang so sweet.*

*Had I my will, beloved, I would say
To God, unto whose bidding all things bow,
That we were still together night and day:
Yet be it done as his behests allow.
I do remember that while she remain'd
With me, she often called me her sweet friend:
But does not now,
Because God drew her towards Him, in the end.
Lady, that peace which none but He can send
Be thine. Even so.*

GIACOMINO PUGLIESI
(D. G. Rossetti)





MAURICE HEWLETT

QUATTROCENTISTERIA

**(HOW SANDRO BOTTICELLI SAW
SIMONETTA IN THE SPRING)**



**PORTLAND MAINE
THOMAS B MOSHER
MDCCCCIV**

21486.40.49.6

✓



0714264



FOREWORD







FOREWORD

LATE in the fall of 1895,—possibly too late for many readers here,—a little book came out in London that had for title, *Earthwork out of Tuscany: being Impressions and Translations of Maurice Hewlett*.

It may be said at once: this *Earthwork* gave us a very lasting delight. For in the episode of Sandro Botticelli and La Bella Simonetta, we came upon a veritable little masterpiece in prose.

How slightly tinged by realism was the story! Presumably there is no basis of fact in the meeting of the great artist and this fair child-woman of the Renaissance. Tradition affirms somewhat of one exquisite figure dominant in Botticelli's portraiture;¹ likewise there

1. See an illustrated article of great interest by Teresina Peck entitled "A Favorite of the Florentines" in *The Lamp* (N. Y.), for April, 1904.

FOREWORD

remain Lorenzo's words concerning the beloved of Giuliano de Medici.¹ Moreover Poliziano and the courtly crew of poets strewed her youthful hearse with laments of no enduring verity,—gone, all of it, and they fallen forever silent.

She indeed remains, the beautiful Simonetta Vespucci; for 'tis the glory of Art that nothing it touches is disannulled or lost. *She* lives, even as the immortal women of Boccaccio live, though heart and brain alike are dust. And thus for ages dead and ages yet to come, Botticelli raised up a woman's fading flower-like face, and this we see to-day in his solemn vision of a fadeless Spring.

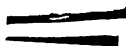
T. B. M.

1. Which Mr. Hewlett has turned into English in his *Earthwork*. See Note at the end of this volume.





QUATTROCENTISTERIA







PROEM

You, tall Ligurian Simonetta,
loved of Sandro, mourned
by Giuliano and, for a season, by
his twisted brother and lord, have
I done well to utter but one side
of your wild humour? The side
a man would take, struck, as your
Sandro was, by a nympholepsy, or,
as Lorenzo was, by the rhymers
appetite for wherewithal to son-
neteer? If I read your story, it
was never pique or a young girl's
petulance drove you to Phrynè's
one justifiable act of self-assertion.
It was honesty, Madonna, or I
have read your grey eyes in vain;
it was enthusiasm—that flame of
our fire so sacred that though it
play the incendiary there shall be
no crime—or where would be
now the "*Vas d'elezione*"?—nor
though it reveal a bystander's grin,

PROEM

any shame at all. I shall live to tell that story of thine, Lady Simonetta, to thy honour and my own respect; for, as the poet says,

*" There is no holier flame
Than flutters torchwise in a stripling
heart,
Revealing mystery all about, and light
Blinding, white, rapturous — a fire from
Heaven
To ash the clay of us, and wing the God
Armed for the freeing of a world in
chains."*

I have seen all memorials of you left behind to be pondered by your Dante, Sandro the painting poet,—the proud clearness of you at the marriage feast of Nastagio degli Onesti; the melting of the sorrow that wells from you in a tide, where you hold the book of your overmastering honour and read *Magnificat Anima Mea* with a sob in your throat; your acquaintance, too, with that grief which was your own hardening; your sojourn, wan and woebegone as

•
PROEM

would become the wife of Moses (maker of jealous gods); all these guises of you, as well as the presentments of your innocent youth, I have seen and adored. But I have ever loved you most where you stand a wistful Venus Anadyomenè — “*Una donzella non con uman volto*”; for I know your heart, Madonna, and see on the sharp edge of your threatened life, Ardour look back to maiden Reclusion, and on (with a pang of foreboding) to mockery and evil judgment. Never fear but I brave your story out to the world ere many days. And if any, with profane leer and tongue in the cheek, take your sorrow for reproach or your pitifulness for a shame, let them receive the lash of the whip from one who will trouble to wield it: *non ragioniam di lor*.

MAURICE HEWLETT.



1875

1



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

HOW SANDRO BOTTICELLI SAW SIMON-
ETTA IN THE SPRING

I

UP at Fiesole, among the olives and chesnuts which cloud the steep, the magnificent Lorenzo was entertaining his guests on a morning in April. The olives were just whitening to silver; they stretched in a trembling sea down the slope. Beyond lay Florence, misty and golden; and round about were the mossy hills, cut sharp and definite against a grey-bue sky, printed with starry buildings and sober ranks of cypress. The sun catching the mosaics of San Miniato and the brazen cross on the façade, made them shine like sword-blades in the quiver of the heat between. For the valley was



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

just a lake of hot air, hot and murky—"fever weather," said the people in the streets—with a glaring summer sun let in between two long spells of fog. 'Twas unnatural at that season, *vis*; but the blessed Saints sent the weather and one could only be careful what one was about at sun-down.

Up at the Villa, with brisk morning airs rustling overhead, in the cool shades of trees and lawns, it was pleasant to lie still, watching these things, while a silky young exquisite sang to his lute a not too audacious ballad about Selvaggia, or Becchina and the saucy Prior of Sant' Onofrio. He sang well too, that dark-eyed boy; the girl at whose feet he was crouched was laughing and blushing at once; and, being very fair, she blushed hotly. She dared not raise her eyes to look into his, and he knew it and was quietly measuring his strength—it was quite a comedy! At each wanton *refrain* he lowered

QUATTROCENTISTERIA

his voice to a whisper and bent a little forward. And the girl's laughter became hysterical; she was shaking with the effort to control herself. At last she looked up with a sort of sob in her breath and saw his mocking smile and the gleam of the wild beast in his eyes. She grew white, rose hastily and turned away to join a group of ladies sitting apart. A man with a heavy, rather sullen face and a bush of yellow hair falling over his forehead in a wave, was standing aside watching all this. He folded his arms and scowled under his big brows; and when the girl moved away his eyes followed her.

The lad ended his song in a broad sarcasm amid bursts of laughter and applause. The Magnificent, sitting in his carved chair, nursed his sallow face and smiled approval. "My brother boasts his invulnerability," he said, turning to his neighbour, "let him look to it, Messer Cupido will have him



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

yet. Already, we can see, he has been let into some of the secrets of the bower." The man bowed and smiled deferentially. "Signor Giuliano has all the qualities to win the love of ladies, and to retain it. Doubtless he awaits his destiny. The Wise Man has said that "Beauty. . . ." The young poet enlarged on his text with some fire in his thin cheeks, while the company kept very silent. It was much to their liking; even Giuliano was absorbed; he sat on the ground clasping one knee between his hands, smiling upwards into vacancy, as a man does whose imagination is touched. Lorenzo nursed his sallow face and beat time to the orator's cadences with his foot; he, too, was abstracted and smiling. At the end he spoke; "Our Marsilio himself has never said nobler words, my Agnolo. The mantle of the Attic prophet has descended indeed upon this Florence. And

QUATTROCENTISTERIA

Beauty, as thou sayest, is from heaven. But where shall it be found here below, and how discerned?" The man of the heavy jowl was standing with folded arms, looking from under his brows at the group of girls. Lorenzo saw everything; he noticed him. "Our Sandro will tell us it is yonder. The Star of Genoa shines over Florence and our poor little constellations are gone out. *Ecco*, my Sandro, gravest and hardiest of painters, go summon Madonna Simonetta and her handmaidens to our Symposium. Agnolo will speak further to us of this sovereignty of Beauty."

The painter bowed his head and moved away.

A green alley vaulted with thick ilex and myrtle formed a tapering vista where the shadows lay misty blue, and pale shafts of light pierced through fitfully. At the far end it ran out into an open space and a splash of sunshine. A mar-

QUATTROCENTISTERIA

ble Ganymede with lifted arms rose in the middle like a white flame. The girls were there, intent upon some commerce of their own, flashing hither and thither over the grass in a flutter of saffron and green and crimson. Simonetta — Sandro could see — was a little apart, a very tall, isolated figure, clear and cold in a recess of shade, standing easily, resting on one hip with her hands behind her. A soft, straight robe of white clipped her close from shoulder to heel; the lines of her figure were thrust forward by her poise. His eye followed the swell of her bosom, very gentle and girlish, and the long folds of her dress falling thence to her knee. While she stood there, proud and remote, a chance beam of the sun shone on her head so that it seemed to burn. "Heaven salutes the Queen of Heaven,— Venus Urania!" With an odd impulse he stopped, crossed himself, and then hurried on.

QUATTROCENTISTERIA

He told his errand to her; having no eyes for the others.

"Signorina—I am to acquaint her Serenity that the divine poet Messer Agnolo is to speak of the sovereign power of beauty; of the Heavenly Beauty whereof Plato taught, as it is believed."

Simonetta arched a slim neck and looked down at the obsequious speaker, or at least he thought so. And he saw how fair she was, a creature how delicate and gracious, with grey eyes frank and wide, and full red lips where a smile (nervous and a little wistful, he judged, rather than defiant) seemed always to hover. Such clear-cut, high beauty made him ashamed; but her colouring (for he was a painter) made his heart beat. She was no ice-bound shadow of deity then! but flesh and blood; a girl—a child, of timid, soft contours, of warm roses and blue veins laced in a pearly skin. And she was crowned with a heavy wealth of



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

red-gold hair, twisted in great coils, bound about with pearls, and smouldering like molten metal where it fell rippling along her neck. She dazzled him, so that he could not face her or look further. His eyes dropped. He stood before her moody, disconcerted.

The girls, who had dissolved their company at his approach, listened to what he had to say linked in knots of twos and threes. They needed no excuses to return; some were philosophers in their way, philosophers and poetesses; some had left their lovers in the ring round Lorenzo. So they went down the green alley still locked by the arms, by the waist or shoulders. They did not wait for Simonetta. She was a Genoese, and proud as the snow. Why did Giuliano love her? *Did* he love her, indeed? He was bewitched then, for she was cold, and a brazen creature in spite of it. How dare she bare her neck so!



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

Oh! 'twas Genoese. "Uomini senza fede e donne senza vergogna," they quoted as they ran.

And Simonetta walked alone down the way with her head high; but Sandro stepped behind, at the edge of her trailing white robe. . . .

. . . The poet was leaning against an ancient alabaster vase, soil-stained, yellow with age and its long sojourn in the loam, but with traces of its carved garlands clinging to it still. He fingered it lovingly as he talked. His oration was concluding, and his voice rose high and tremulous; there were sparks in his hollow eyes. . . .

"And as this sovereign Beauty is queen of herself, so she is subject to none other, owns to no constraining custom, fears no reproach of man. What she wills, that has the force of a law. Being Beauty, her deeds are lovely and worshipful. Therefore Phrynè, whom men, groping in darkness and the



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

dull ways of earth, dubbed courtesan, shone in a Court of Law before the assembled nobles of Athens, naked and undismayed in the blaze of her fairness. And Athens discerned the goddess and trembled. Yes, and more; even as Aphrodite, whose darling she was, arose pure from the foam, so she too came up out of the sea in the presence of a host, and the Athenians, seeing no shame, thought none, but, rather, revered her the more. For what shame is it that the body of one so radiant in clear perfections should be revealed? Is then the garment of the soul, her very mould and image, so shameful? Shall we seek to know her essence by the garment of a garment, or hope to behold that which really is in the shadows we cast upon shadows? Shame is of the brute dullard who thinks shame. The evil ever sees Evil glaring at him. Plato, the golden-mouthed, with



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

the soul of pure fire, has said the truth of this matter in his *De Republica*, the fifth book, where he speaks of young maids sharing the exercise of the Palæstra, yea, and the Olympic contests even! For he says, 'Let the wives of our wardens bare themselves, for their virtue will be a robe; and let them share the toils of war and defend their country. And for the man who laughs at naked women exercising their bodies for high reasons, his laughter is a fruit of unripe wisdom, and he himself knows not what he is about; for that is ever the best of sayings that the useful is the noble and the hurtful the base.' . . ."

There was a pause. The name of Plato had had a strange effect upon the company. You would have said they had suddenly entered a church and had felt all lighter interests sink under the weight of the dim, echoing nave. After a few moments the poet



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

spoke again in a quieter tone, but his voice had lost none of the unction which had enriched it. . . . "Beauty is queen: by the virtue of Deity, whose image she is, she reigns, lifts up, fires. Let us beware how we tempt Deity lest we perish ourselves. Actæon died when he gazed unbidden upon the pure body of Artemis; but Artemis herself rayed her splendour upon Endymion, and Endymion is among the immortals. We fall when we rashly confront Beauty, but that Beauty who comes unawares may nerve our souls to wing to heaven." He ended on a resonant note, and then, still looking out over the valley, sank into his seat. Lorenzo, with a fine humility, got up and kissed his thin hand. Giuliano looked at Simonetta, trying to recall her gaze, but she remained standing in her place, seeing nothing of her companions. She was thinking of something, frown-



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

ing a little and biting her lip, her hands were before her; her slim fingers twisted and locked themselves nervously, like a tangle of snakes. Then she tossed her head, as a young horse might, and looked at Giuliano suddenly, full in the eyes. He rose to meet her with a deprecating smile, cap in hand — but she walked past him, almost brushing him with her gown, but never flinching her full gaze, threaded her way through the group to the back, behind the poet, where Sandro was. He had seen her coming, indeed he had watched her furtively throughout the oration, but her near presence disconcerted him again — and he looked down. She was strongly excited with her quick resolution; her colour had risen and her voice faltered when she began to speak. She spoke eagerly, running her words together.

“*Ecco*, Messer Sandro,” she whispered blushing. “You have



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

heard these sayings. . . . Who is there in Florence like me?"

"There is no one," said Sandro simply.

"I will be your Lady Venus," she went on breathlessly. "You shall paint me, rising from the sea-foam. . . . The Genoese love the sea." She was still eager and defiant; her bosom rose and fell unchecked.

"The Signorina is mocking me; it is impossible; the Signorina knows it."

"Eh, *Madonna!* is it so shameful to be fair—Star of the Sea as your poets sing at evening? Do you mean that I dare not do it? Listen then, Signor Pittore; to-morrow morning at mass-time you will come to the Villa Vespucci with your brushes and pans and you will ask for Monna Simonetta. Then you will see. Leave it now; it is settled." And she walked away with her head high and the same superb smile on her red lips.



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

Mockery! She was in dead earnest; all her child's feelings were in hot revolt. These women who had whispered to each other, sniggered at her dress, her white neck and her free carriage; Giuliano who had presumed so upon her candour—these prying, censorious Florentines—she would strike them dumb with her amazing loveliness. They sang her a goddess that she might be flattered and suffer their company: she would show herself a goddess indeed—the star of her shining Genoa, where men were brave and silent and maidens frank like the sea. Yes, and then she would withdraw herself suddenly and leave them forlorn and dismayed.

As for Sandro, he stood where she had left him, peering after her with a mist in his eyes. He seemed to be looking over the hill-side, over the city glowing afar off gold and purple in the hot air, to Mont' Oliveto, and the heights, where a



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

line of black cypresses stood about a low white building. At one angle of the building was a little turret with a belvedere of round arches. The tallest cypress just topped the windows. There his eyes seemed to rest.

II

At mass-time Sandro, folded in his shabby green cloak, stepped into the sun on the Ponte Vecchio. The morning mists were rolling back under the heat; you began to see the yellow line of houses stretching along the turbid river on the far side, and frowning down upon it with blank, mud-stained faces. Above, through steaming air, the sky showed faintly blue and a *campanile* to the right loomed pale and uncertain like a ghost. The sound of innumerable bells floated over the still city. Hardly a soul was abroad; here and there a couple of dusty peasants were trudging in with baskets of eggs and jars of milk and oil; a boat passed down to the fishing, and the oar knocked sleepily in the rowlock as she cleared the bridge. And above, on the heights



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

of Mont' Oliveto, the tapering forms of cypresses were faintly outlined—straight bars of shadow—and the level ridge of a roof ran lightly back into the soft shroud.

Sandro could mark these things as he stepped resolutely on to the bridge, crossed it, and went up a narrow street among the sleeping houses. The day held golden promise; it was the day of his life! Meantime the mist clung to him and nipped him; what had fate in store? What was to be the issue? In the Piazza Santo Spirito, grey and hollow-sounding in the chilly silences, his own footsteps echoed solemnly as he passed by the door of the great ragged church. Through the heavy darkness within lights flickered faintly and went; service was not begun. A drab crew of cripples lounged on the steps yawning and shivering, and two country girls were strolling to the mass with brown

arms round each other's waists. When Sandro's footfall clattered on the stones they stopped by the door looking after him and laughed to see his dull face and muffled figure. In the street beyond he heard a bell jingling, hasty, incessant; and soon a white-robed procession swept by him, fluttering vestments, tapers, and the Host under a canopy, silk and gold. Sandro snatched at his cap and dropped on his knees in the road, crouching low and muttering under his breath as the vision went past. He remained kneeling for a moment after it had gone, then crossed himself—forehead, breast, lip—and hurried forward. . . . He stepped under the archway into the Court. There was a youth with a cropped head and swarthy neck lounging there teasing a spaniel. As the steps sounded on the flags he looked up; the old green cloak and clumsy shoes of the visitor did not interest him;



he turned his back and went on with his game. Sandro accosted him— Was the Signorina at the house? The boy went on with his game. "Eh, Diavolo? I know nothing at all," he said.

Sandro raised his voice till it rang round the courtyard. "You will go at once and inquire. You will say to the Signorina that Sandro di Mariano Filipepi the Florentine painter is here by her orders; that he waits her pleasure below."

The boy had got up; he and Sandro eyed each other for a little space. Sandro was the taller and had the glance of a hawk. So the porter went. . . .

. . . Presently with throbbing brows he stood on the threshold of Simonetta's chamber. It was the turret room of the villa and its four arched windows looked through a leafy tracery over towards Florence. Sandro could see down below him in the haze

QUATTROCENTISTERIA

the glitter of the Arno and the dusky dome of Brunelleschi cleave the sward of the hills like a great burnished bowl. In the room itself there was tapestry, the Clemency of Scipio, with courtiers in golden cuirasses and tall plumes, and peacocks and huge Flemish horses—a rich profusion of crimson and blue drapery and stout limbed soldiery. On a bracket, above a green silk curtain, was a silver statuette of Madonna and the Bambino Gesù, with a red lamp flickering feebly before. By the windows a low divan heaped with velvet cushions and skins. But for a coffer and a prayer desk and a curtained recess which enshrined Simonetta's bed, the room looked wind-swept and bare.

When he entered Simonetta was standing by the window leaning her hand against the ledge for support. She was draped from top to toe in a rose-coloured mantle which shrouded her head like



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

a nun's wimple and then fell in heavy folds to the ground. She flushed as he came in, but saluted him with a grave inclination. Neither spoke. The silent greeting, the full consciousness in each of their parts, gave a curious religious solemnity to the scene—like some familiar but stately Church mystery. Sandro busied himself mechanically with his preparations—he was a lover and his pulse was chaotic, but he had come to paint—and when these were done, on tip-toe, as it were, he looked timidly about him round the room, seeking where to pose her. Then he motioned her with the same reverential, preoccupied air, silent still, to a place under the silver Madonna. . . .

. . . There was a momentary quiver of withdrawal. Simonetta blushed vividly and drooped her eyes down to her little bare foot peeping out below the lines of the rosy cloak. The cloak's warmth

shone on her smooth skin and rayed over her cheeks. In her flowery loveliness she looked diaphanous, ethereal; and yet you could see what a child she was, with her bright audacity, her ardour and her wilfulness flushing and paling about her like the dawn. There she stood trembling on the brink. . . .

Suddenly all her waywardness shot into her eyes; she lifted her arms and the cloak fell back like the shard of a young flower; then, delicate and palpitating as a silver reed, she stood up in the soft light of the morning, and the sun, slanting in between the golden leaves and tendrils, kissed her neck and shrinking shoulder.

Sandro stood facing her, moody and troubled, fingering his brushes and bits of charcoal; his shaggy brows were knit, he seemed to be breathing hard. He collected himself with an effort and looked up at her as she stood before him



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

shrinking, awe-struck, panting at the thing she had done. Their eyes met, and the girl's distress increased; she raised her hand to cover her bosom; her breath came in short gasps from parted lips, but her wide eyes still looked fixedly into his, with such blank panic that a sudden movement might really have killed her. He saw it all; she! there at his mercy. Tears swam and he trembled. Ah! the gracious lady! what divine condescension! what ineffable courtesy! But the artist in him was awakened almost at the same moment; his looks wandered in spite of her piteous candour and his own nothingness. Sandro the poet would have fallen on his face with an "Exi a me, nam peccator sum." Sandro the painter was different—no mercy there. He made a snatch at a carbon and raised his other hand with a kind of command—"Holy Virgin! what a line! Stay as you are, I implore

QUATTROCENTISTERIA

you: swerve not one hair's breadth and I have you for ever!" There was conquest in his voice.

So Simonetta stood very still, hiding her bosom with her hand, but never took her watch off the enemy. As he ran blindly about doing a hundred urgent indispensable things,—noting the lights, the line she made, how her arm cut across the folds of the curtain—she dogged him with staring, fascinated eyes, just as a hare, crouching in her form, watches a terrier hunting round her and waits for the end.

But the enemy was disarmed. Sandro the passionate, the lover, the brooding devotee was gone; so was *la bella Simonetta* the beloved, the be-hymned. Instead, here was a fretful painter, dashing lines and broad smudges of shade on his paper, while before him rose an exquisite, slender, swaying form, glistening carnation and silver, and, over all, the madden-

QUATTROCENTO

ing glow of red-gold hair. Could he but catch those velvet shadows, those delicate, glossy, reflected lights! Body of Bacchus! How could he put them in! What picture she was! Look at the sun on her shoulder! and her hair—Christ! how it burned! It was a curious moment. The girl who had never understood or cared to understand this humble love guessed now that he was lost in the artist. She felt that she was simply an effect and she resented it as a crowning insult. Her colour rose again, her red lips gathered into a pout. If Sandro had been known, she was his at that instant. He had but to drop the painter's brushes, throw down his brushes, set his heart and hot eyes bare—to open his arms and she would have flung into them and nestled there; so fierce was her instinct just then to be loved, she, who had always been loved! But Sandro knew nothing and cared nothing. He

was absorbed in the gracious lines of her body, the lithe long neck, the drooping shoulder, the tenderness of her youth; and then the grand open curve of the hip and thigh on which she was poised. He drew them in with a free hand in great sweeping lines, eagerly, almost angrily; once or twice he broke his carbon and—body of a dog!—he snatched at another.

This lasted a few minutes only: even Simonetta, with all her maiden tremors still feverishly acute, hardly noticed the flight of time; she was so hot with the feeling of her wrongs, the slight upon her victorious fairness. Did she not *know* how fair she was? She was getting very angry; she had been made a fool of. All Florence would come and gape at the picture and mock her in the streets with bad names and coarse gestures as she rode by. She looked at Sandro. Santa Maria! how hot he was! His hair was drooping over his eyes!

QUATTROCENTISTERIA

He tossed it back every second! And his mouth was open, one could see his tongue working! Why had she not noticed that great mouth before? 'Twas the biggest in all Florence. O! why had he come? She was frightened, remorseful, a child again, with a trembling pathetic mouth and shrinking limbs. And then her heart began to beat under her slim fingers. She pressed them down into her flesh to stay those great masterful throbs. A tear gathered in her eye; larger and larger it grew, and then fell. A shining drop rested on the round of her cheek and rolled slowly down her chin to her protecting hand, and lay there half hidden, shining like a rain-drop between two curving petals of a rose.

It was just at that moment the painter looked up from his work and shook his bush of hair back. Something in his sketch had displeased him; he looked up frown-



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

ing, with a brush between his teeth. When he saw the tear-stained, distressful, beautiful face it had a strange effect upon him. He dropped nerveless like a wounded man, to his knees, and covered his eyes with his hands. "Ah Madonna! for the pity of heaven forgive me! forgive me! I have sinned, I have done thee fearful wrong; I, who still dare to love thee." He uncovered his face and looked up radiant: his own words had inspired him. "Yes," he went on, with a steadfast smile, "I, Sandro, the painter, the poor devil of a painter, have seen thee and I dare to love!" His triumph was short-lived. Simonetta had grown deadly white, her eyes burned, she had forgotten herself. She was tall and slender as a lily, and she rose, shaking, to her height.

"Thou presumest strangely," she said, in a slow still voice, "Go! Go in peace!"



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

She was conqueror. In her calm scorn, she was like a young immortal, some cold victorious Cynthia whose chastity had been flouted. Sandro was pale too: he said nothing and did not look at her again. She stood quivering with excitement, watching him with the same intent alertness as he rolled up his paper and crammed his brushes and pencils into the breast of his jacket. She watched him still as he backed out of the room and disappeared through the curtains of the archway. She listened to his footsteps along the corridor, down the stair. She was alone in the silence of the sunny room. Her first thought was for her cloak; she snatched it up and veiled herself shivering as she looked fearfully round the walls. And then she flung herself on the piled cushions before the window and sobbed piteously like an abandoned child.

The sun slanted in between



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

the golden leaves and tendrils
and played in the tangle of her
hair. . . .

III

At ten o'clock on the morning of April the twenty-sixth, a great bell began to toll: two beats heavy and slow, and then silence, while the air echoed the reverberation, moaning. Sandro, in shirt and breeches, with bare feet spread broad, was at work in his garret on the old bridge. He stayed his hand as the strong tone struck, bent his head and said a prayer: "Miserere ei Domine; requiem eternam dona, Domine;" the words came out of due order as if he was very conscious of their import. Then he went on. And the great bell went on; two beats together, and then silence. It seemed to gather solemnity and a heavier message as he painted. Through the open window a keen draught of air blew in with dust and a scrap of shaving from the



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

Lung' Arno down below; it circled round his workshop, fluttering the sketches and rags pinned to the walls. He looked out on a bleak landscape—San Miniato in heavy shade, and the white houses by the river staring like dead faces. A strong breeze was abroad; it whipped the brown water and raised little curling billows, ragged and white at the edges, and tossed about snaps of surf. It was cold. Sandro shivered as he shut to the casement; and the stiffening gale rattled at it fitfully. Once again it thrust it open, bringing wild work among the litter in the room. He made fast with the rain driving in his face. And above the howling of the squall he heard the sound of the great bell, steady and unmoved as if too full of its message to be put aside. Yet it was coming to him athwart the wind.

Sandro stood at his casement and looked at the weather—beating rain and yeasty water. He



QUATTROCENTIERIA

counted, rather nervously, the pulses between each pair of the bell's deep tones. He was impressionable to circumstances, and the coincidence of storm and passing-bell awed him. . . . "Either the God of Nature suffers or the fabric of the world is breaking;" he remembered a scrap of talk wafted towards him (as he stood in attendance) from some humanist at Lorenzo's table only yesterday, above the light laughter and snatches of song. That breakfast party at the Camaldoli yesterday! What a contrast—the even spring weather with the sun in a cloudless sky, and now this icy dead morning with its battle of wind and bell, fighting, he thought,—over the failing breath of some strong man. Man! God, more like. "The God of Nature suffers," he murmured as he turned to his work. . . .

Simonetta had not been there yesterday. He had not seen her, indeed, since that nameless day

when she had first transported him with the radiance of her bare beauty and then struck him down with a level gaze from steel-cold eyes. And he had deserved it, he had—she had said—“presumed strangely.” Three more words only had she uttered and he had slunk out from her presence like a dog, What a goddess! Venus Urania! So she, too, might have ravished a worshipper as he prayed, and, after, slain him for a careless word. Cruel? No, but a Goddess. Beauty had no laws; she was above them. Agnolo himself had said it, from Plato. . . . Holy Michael! What a blast! Black and desperate weather. . . . “Either the God of Nature suffers.” . . . God shield all Christian souls on such a day! . . .

One came and told him Simonetta Vespucci was dead. Some fever had torn at her and raced through all her limbs, licking up her life as it passed. No one had

QUATTROCENTISTERIA

known of it—it was so swift! But there had just been time to fetch a priest; Fra Matteo, they said, from the Carmine, had shrived her ('twas a bootless task, God knew, for the child had babbled so, her wits wandered, look you), and then he had performed the last office. One had fled to tell the Medici. Giuliano was wild with grief; 'twas as if *he* had killed her instead of the Springague—but then, people said he loved her well! And our Lorenzo had bid them swing the great bell of the Duomo—Sandro had heard it perhaps?—and there was to be a public procession, and a Requiem sung at Santa Croce before they took her back to Genoa to lie with her fathers. Eh! Bacchus! She was fair and Giuliano had loved her well. 'Twas natural enough then. So the gossip ran out to tell his news to more attentive ears, and Sandro stood in his place, intoning softly "Te Deum Laudamus."



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

He understood it all. There had been a dark and awful strife—earth shuddering as the black shadow of death swept by. Through tears now the sun beamed broad over the gentle city where she lay lapped in her mossy hills. “*Lux eterna lucet ei*,” he said with a steady smile; “*atque lucebit*,” he added after a pause. He had been painting that day an agonizing Christ, red and languid, crowned with thorns. Some of his own torment seems to have entered it, for, looking at it now, we see, first of all, wild eyeballs staring with the mad earnestness, the purposeless intensity of one seized or “possessed.” He put the panel away and looked about for something else, the sketch he had made of Simonetta on that last day. When he had found it, he rolled it straight and set it on his easel. It was not the first charcoal study he had made from life, but a brush drawing on dark



QUATTROCENTISTA

paper, done in sepia-wash and the lights in white lead. He stood looking into it with his hands clasped. About half a braccio high, faint and shadowy in the pale tint he had used, he saw her there victim rather than Goddess. Standing timidly and wistfully, shrinking rather, veiling herself, maiden-like, with her hands and hair, with lips trembling and dewy eyes, she seemed to him now an immortal who must needs suffer for some great end; live and suffer and die; live again, and suffer and die. It was a doom perpetual like Demeter's, to bear, to nurture, to lose and to find her Persephone. She had stood there immaculate and apprehensive, a wistful victim. Three days before he had seen her thus; and now she was dead. He would see her no more.

Ah! Yes, once more he would see her. . . .

.
They carried dead Simonetta



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

through the streets of Florence with her pale face uncovered and a crown of myrtle in her hair. People thronging there held their breath, or wept to see such still loveliness; and her poor parted lips wore a patient little smile, and her eyelids were pale violet and lay heavy to her cheek. White, like a bride, with a nosegay of orange-blossom and syringa at her throat, she lay there on her bed with lightly folded hands and the strange aloofness and preoccupation all the dead have. Only her hair burned about her like a molten copper; and the wreath of myrtle leaves ran forward to her brows and leapt beyond them into a tongue.

The great procession swept forward; black brothers of Misericordia shrouded and awful, bore the bed or stalked before it with torches that guttered and flared sootily in the dancing light of day. They held the pick of Florence,

QUATTROCENTISTERIA

those scowling shrouds—*Giuliano* and *Lorenzo, Pazzi, Tornabuoni, Soderini* or *Pulci*; and behind, *old Cattaneo*, battered with storms, walked heavily, swinging his long arms and looking into the day's face as if he would try another fall with Death yet. Priests and acolytes, tapers, banners, vestments and a great silver Crucifix, they drifted by, chanting the dirge for *Simonetta*; and she, as if for a sacrifice, lifted up on her silken bed, lay couched like a white flower edged colour of flame. . . .

. . . *Santa Croce*, the great church, stretched forward beyond her into distances of grey mist and cold spaces of light. Its bare vastness was damp like a vault. And she lay in the midst listless, heavy-lidded, apart, with the half-smile, as it seemed, of some secret mirth. Round her the great candles smoked and flickered, and mass was sung at the High Altar for her soul's repose. *Sandro* stood



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

alone facing the shining altar but looking fixedly at Simonetta on her couch. He was white and dry—parched lips and eyes that ached and smarted. Was this the end? Was it possible, my God! that the transparent, unearthly thing lying there so prone and pale was dead? Had such loveliness aught to do with life or death? Ah! sweet lady, dear heart, how tired she was, how deadly tired! From where he stood he could see with intolerable anguish the sombre rings round her eyes and the violet shadows on the lids, her folded hands and the straight, meek line to her feet. And her poor wan face with its wistful, pitiful little smile was turned half aside on the delicate throat, as if in a last appeal:—"Leave me now, O Florentines, to my rest. I have given you all I had: ask no more. I was a young girl, a child; too young for your eager strivings.



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

You have killed me with your play; let me be now, let me sleep!" Poor child! Poor child! Sandro was on his knees with his face pressed against the pulpit and tears running through his fingers as he prayed. . . .

As he had seen her, so he painted. As at the beginning of life in a cold world, passive and meeting the long trouble of existence he painted her a rapt Presence floating evenly to our earth. The grey, translucent sea laps silently upon a little creek and, in the hush of a still dawn, the myrtles and sedges on the water's brink are quiet. It is a dream in his tones that he gives us, grey as green and steely blue; and just that, and some homely magic in his own, hint the commerce of another world with man's discarded domain. Men and women are asleep, and as in an early waking you may startle the hares at the play, or see the creatures of the



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

darkness—owls and night hawks and heavy moths—flit with fantastic purpose over the familiar scene, so here it comes upon you suddenly that you have surprised Nature's self at her mysteries; you are let into the secret; you have caught the spirit of the April woodland as she glides over the pasture to the copse. And that, indeed, was Sandro's fortune. He caught her in just such a propitious hour. He saw the sweet wild thing, pure and undefiled by touch of earth; caught her in that pregnant pause of time ere she had lighted. Another moment and a buxom nymph of the grove would fold her in a rosy mantle, coloured as the earliest wood-anemones are. She would vanish, we know, into the daffodils or a bank of violets. And you might tell her presence there, or in the rustle of the myrtles, or coo of doves mating in the pines; you might feel her genius in the scent



QUATTROCENTISTERIA

of the earth or the kiss of the West wind; but you could only see her in mid-April, and you should look for her over the sea. She always comes with the first warmth of the year.

But daily, before he painted, Sandro knelt in a dark chapel in Santa Croce, while a blue-chinned priest said mass for the repose of Simonetta's soul.





NOTE





•

•

•

•

•

•



NOTE

PERÒ, what gentlemen they were, these "ingegni fiorentini," these Tuscan wits! What innate breeding and reticence! What punctilious loyalty to the little observances of literature, of wall-decoration, call it, in the most licentiously minded of them! Lorenzo Magnifico was a rake and could write lewdly enough, as we all know. Yet, when he chose, that is when Art bade him, how unerringly he chose the right momentum. His too was "*la mente che non erra.*" I found this of his the other day, and must needs close up my notes with it. The very notion of it was, in his time, a convention; a series of sonnets bound together by an argument; a *Vita nova* without its overmastering occasion. Simon-

NOTE

etta was dead; ¹ whereupon "tutti i fiorentini ingegni, come si conviene in sì pubblica jattura, diversamente ed avversamente si dolsono, chi in versi, chi in prosa." The poor dead lady was, in fact, a butt for these sharpshooters. Yet hear Lorenzo.

"Died, as we have declared, in our city a certain lady, whereby all people alike in Florence were moved to compassion. And this is no marvel, seeing that with all earthly beauty and courtesy she was adorned as, before her day, no other under heaven could have been. Among her other excellent parts, she had a carriage so sweet and winsome that whosoever should have any commerce or

1. The actual Simonetta Cattaneo was born in Genoa A. D. 1454, and, a young wife at the age of sixteen, came with her boy husband, Marco Vespucci, to Florence, where she died on April 26, 1476. Her lover, Giuliano de' Medici, was assassinated two years later on the anniversary of her death.

NOTE

friendly dealing with her, straightway fell to believe himself enamoured of her. Ladies also, and all youth of her degree, not only suffered no harbourage to unkindly thought upon this her eminence over all the rest, nor grudged it her at all, but stoutly upheld and took pleasure in her loveliness and gracious bearing; and this so honestly that you would have found it hard to be believed so many men without jealousy could have loved her, or so many ladies without envy give her place. So, the more her life by its comely ordering had endeared her to mankind, pity also for her death, for the flower of her youth, and for a beauteousness which in death, it may be, showed the more resplendently than in life, did breed in the heart the smarting of great desire. Therefore she was carried uncovered on the bier from her dwelling to the place of burial, and moved all men, thronging there to see her, to



WITH

abundant shedding of tears. And in some who before had not been aware of her, after pity grew great marvel for that she, in death, had overcome that loveliness which had seemed insuperable while she yet lived. Among which people, who before had not known her, there grew a bitterness and, as it were, ground of reproach, that they had not been acquainted with so fair a thing before that hour when they must be shut off from it for ever; to know her thus and have perpetual grief of her. But truly in her was made manifest that which our Petrarch had spoken when he said,

‘Death showed him lovely in her lovely face.’”

This is to write like a gentleman and an artist, with ear attuned to the subtlest fall and cadence, with scrupulous weighing of words that their true outline shall hold clear and sharp. It is *intarsiatura*, skilful and clean at the edges.



NOTE

He goes on to play with his hammered thought, always as delicately and precisely as before.

“Falling, therefore, such an one to death, all the wits of Florence as is seemly in so public a calamity, lamented severally and mutually, some in rhyme, some in prose, the ruefulness of it; and bound themselves to exalt her excellence each after the contriving of his mind: in which company I, too, must needs be; I, too, mingle rhymes with tears. So I did in the sonnets below rehearsed whereof the first began thus:

‘O limpid shining star that to thy beam.’

“Night has fallen: together we walked, a dear friend and I, together talking of our common sorrow: and so speaking, the night being wondrous clear, I lifted my eyes to a star of exceeding brilliancy, which appeared in the west, of such assured splendour as not alone to excel other stars,

NOTE

but so eagerly to shine that it threw in shadow all the lights of heaven about it. Whereof having great marvel, I turned to my friend, saying—‘We ought not to wonder at this sight, seeing that the soul of that most gentle lady is of a truth either re-informed in this, a new star, or conjoined to shine with it. Wherefore there is no marvel in such exceeding brightness; and we who took comfort in her living delights, may even now be appeased by her appearance in a limpid star. And if our vision for such a light is tender and fragile, we should beseech her shade, that is the god in her, to make us bolder by withholding some part of her beam that we sometimes look upon her, nor sear our eyes. But, to say sooth, this is no overboldness in her, endowed as she was with all the power of her beauty, that she should strive to shine more excellently than all the other stars, or even yet more



NOTE

proudly than Phœbus himself, asking of him his very chariot, that she, rather, may rule our day. Which thing, if you allow it without presumption in our star, how vilely shows the impertinence of Death to have laid hands upon such loveliness and authority as hers.' And since these my reasonings seemed of the stuff proper for a sonnet, I took leave of my friend and composed that one which follows; speaking in it of the above mentioned star."

(From *Earthwork out of Tuscany*.)

Mr. Hewlett then goes on to say: "The Sonnet is in the right Petrarchian vein, adroit and shallow as you please." On the other hand Symonds (*Renaissance in Italy*, iv: 327), translates it in full, and declares that "from that moment Lorenzo began to write poems", and making due allowance for the times and the man, we are disposed to concur in this decision.



NOTE

" O lucid star, that with transcendent light
Quenchest of all those neighbouring
stars the gleam,
Why thus beyond thine usage dost thou
stream,
Why art thou fain with Phœbus still to
fight?
Haply those beauteous eyes, which from
our sight
Death stole, who now doth vaunt him-
self supreme,
Thou hast assumed : clad with their
glorious beam,
Well may'st thou claim the sun-god's
chariot bright.
Listen, new star, new regent of the day,
Who with unwonted radiance gilds our
heaven,
O listen, goddess, to the prayers we
pray !
Let so much splendour from thy sphere
be riven
That to these eyes, which fain would
weep alway,
Unblinded, thy glad sight may yet be
given ! "





•





100

THE BORROWER WILL BE
THE COST OF OVERDUE NOT
THIS BOOK IS NOT RETU
THE LIBRARY ON OR BEFORE
DATE STAMPED BELOW.

AN 21 1977 H

S22246
05022-1976

